

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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August 18, 2015

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL TO: pastides@sc.edu

**President Harris Pastides
Office of the President
University of South Carolina
Osborne Administration Building, Suite 206
Columbia SC 29208**

Dear Dr. Pastides:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding the football chaplain at the University of South Carolina. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with 22,700 members across the country. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to represent the views of freethinkers (atheists, agnostics and nonbelievers).

For years, FFRF has received complaints about sports chaplains, both at the high school and university level. These complaints led us to issue a report this month detailing the nature and extent of chaplaincies and the problems that they create for student-athletes, as well as the problems that they create for USC.

The University of South Carolina has a football chaplain. It makes no difference if the chaplain is unofficial, not school-sponsored, or a volunteer, because chaplains are given access to the team as a means for coaches to impose religion, usually Christianity, on their players. Under the circumstances, the chaplain's actions are attributable to the university and those actions are unconstitutional. For instance, USC chaplain Adrian Despres receives \$4,500 per year for his work as a "Character Coach" despite USC's chaplain policy which states that a "chaplain may not be remunerated by the Athletic Department for services proved and work performed in his or her capacity as chaplain."

Please read the enclosed report on the nature and extent of these chaplaincies and the legal liability that the University of South Carolina exposes itself to by allowing its chaplaincy to continue. The current policies at the University of South Carolina fail to properly protect your student athletes' rights of conscience and pose a high degree of risk of discrimination. It is not a matter of if, but when an issue will arise from this entanglement.

In order to aid the university in protecting its students from religious discrimination, we are also recommending the adoption of a model policy. If adopted, this model policy would not only bring the university into compliance with the law but it would send the message that the University of South Carolina values the rights of every student athlete to hold his or her own religious or nonreligious views, free from direct or indirect coercion or contrary endorsement.

We would be happy to consult with you and the university further regarding this matter.

Sincerely,



**Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor
Co-Presidents**